

## Innovation Brief

# Indicators of Success: Developing System and Youth Outcome Measures for Juvenile Justice Agencies

Knowledge of the effectiveness of the Louisiana *Models for Change* reform efforts has, in large part, been attributable to the implementation of local data driven programs that monitor and track the impact of both the reform efforts and the youth served. Two types of outcomes were measured across the state.

System level outcomes focused on the effectiveness of changes made to policies and programs, while youth outcomes measured how reform efforts directly affected the youth involved within the juvenile justice system. Five data collection tools that were developed to measure the effectiveness of LaMfC reform efforts are discussed. The data obtained from these innovations have provided key empirical evidence, supporting the need for these data driven programs state-wide.



### The Issue

An important component of juvenile justice reform is measuring the impact of reform efforts on the system, youth served, and the larger community. Understanding the significance of the changes helps professionals and stakeholders gain an increased understanding of the importance of the work and the positive impact of the efforts. The use of data to provide objective, accurate, and timely assessments of success is a critical piece to any juvenile justice reform. Such reliance on data can ensure that changes are effective, cost-efficient, and protect

public safety. It also indicates whether the changes should be replicated by other jurisdictions.

During the initial stages of the Louisiana *Models for Change* (LaMfC) work, each site was asked to develop an outcome monitoring plan (in collaboration with national consultants, the lead entity [i.e. Institute for Public Health and Justice -IPHJ], and local universities) to outline the goals of the project, methods for evaluating the effectiveness of each goal, and the final product (see the LaMfC outcome monitoring plan). During this

process, two issues quickly became apparent. First, many juvenile justice agencies across the state were not using data to monitor trends, track outcomes, or measure effectiveness. Secondly, most agencies did not have the capacity to accomplish these tasks.

A number of innovations were developed to allow LaMfC sites to collect data and monitor the impact of their work. These innovations ranged from simple and inexpensive “one-page” forms to surveys distributed to multiple stakeholders within a jurisdiction. The ultimate goal was to ensure that the information collected through these innovations could monitor the success of the reform efforts on both the system and the youth. Therefore, two types of measures were developed to assess LaMfC success:

- 1. System-Level Outcomes** focused on the impact of changes on system functioning, such as policies concerning assessments of risk and needs, the implementation of new intervention programs, or changes in how system-level decisions are made. Examples of system-level measures include the number of youth screened/assessed, the number of youth detained, or the number of youth sent to a particular program or process.
- 2. Youth Outcomes** were used to measure the success of a program or policy by the impact on the youth served. Outcome measures are typically tied to agency goals. These outcomes focus on treatment effectiveness, public safety, and reduction in behavior. Examples of outcome measures are treatment completion, recidivism, reductions in disproportionate minority contact (DMC), or reductions in out of home placements for low risk offenders.

In this brief, five data collection tools that were developed to measure the effectiveness of LaMfC reform efforts are discussed. The innovations provide examples of both system-level and youth outcome measures applied in various points of the juvenile justice system. The development of these measures was a collaborative effort among site stakeholders (e.g., juvenile judge, district attorney), national experts, the LaMfC lead entity, and

local universities.

## Innovations

### Discipline-Specific Innovations

#### Status Offender Intervention Data Collection

**Plan.** One component of LaMfC involved restructuring local informal status offender processes and programming in a local jurisdiction (i.e., FINS- Families In Need of Services). The restructuring of the program involved implementing school exhaustion policies prior to referral, developing eligibility criteria, implementing the MAYSI-2 screening at intake, and changing case management protocols including contacts and length of supervision. As a result, it was necessary to implement a monitoring system to track the impact of these changes on both the program (system) and the youth served (outcome). The full data collection plan included over sixty data elements that were continually entered and updated in an electronic spreadsheet (Microsoft Excel) by each case manager. Each data element fell under one of the general categories listed below:

#### Youth Information

- Demographic characteristics
- School information
- Mental health /Substance use
- Prior/Current welfare system involvement
- Prior delinquency history
- Prior FINS involvement

#### Case Information

- Referral source and behavior
- Eligibility
- Screening & assessment results

#### Service Delivery

- Treatment recommendations
- Case management

#### Case Closure

- Reason for closure
- Client satisfaction

#### Follow-up Information

- New FINS referrals
- New Juvenile Justice System involvement

Using this information, a number of system-level measures were tracked to monitor the impact of the changes to the program. These measures included the number of referrals to the program, the number of referrals made by the school, the number of youth screened using the MAYSI-2, and the number of referrals to treatment services.

Information collected through this process indicated that overall referrals to the FINS program declined by 12% and school-based referrals declined by 22% from 2010 to 2011.

In addition, the FINS program identified three main goals of the program: linkage to community services, keeping kids out of the formal juvenile justice system, and reductions in behavior problems. Therefore, outcome measures were also tracked to monitor treatment completion, program completion, changes in behavior, additional FINS referrals, and court involvement.

Outcome measures from 2010 and 2011 indicated that the proportion of cases that completed the program successfully increased by 18% and the number of youth referred to juvenile court decreased by 31%. Thus, these new data collection procedures provided empirical evidence of the effectiveness of the changes to the FINS program.

**Law Enforcement Contact Sheet.** Reducing disproportionate minority contact (DMC) at arrest and detention was also a focus of LaMfC. As a result, a number of outcome measures were identified including a reduction in the number of arrests for minor offenses, DMC with law enforcement, number of school-based arrests, the number of youth detained for minor offenses, and DMC at detention. At the beginning of LaMfC, a number of local parishes were unable to track information on juvenile arrests because there was no consistent data management system used by all arresting agencies.

Therefore, a one-page “Contact Sheet” was developed in one local jurisdiction to allow the parish to track all juvenile contacts with law enforcement. Once a month, the forms, which were completed by law enforcement officers after contact with youth, were sent to the DMC coordinator at the Department of Juvenile Services and entered into an electronic spreadsheet (Microsoft Excel). The “Contact Sheet” collected information on:

- Youth’s demographic characteristics
- Law enforcement agency making contact
- Offense or reason for contact
- Complaint source
- Service referral
- Disposition or outcome of contact.

The information obtained through this process indicated that, from 2009-2011, there was a 5% decline in total arrests, there was a 4% decline in arrests for status offenses, and there was a 20% decline in school-based arrests. In regards to DMC, the proportion of arrests that were minority youth declined 11% and the number of minority youth transported to the local detention center declined by 15%. Thus, the information from this one-page form, allowed the parish to track arrests in a consistent and cost-effective manner in order to evaluate their efforts to decrease DMC.

**District Attorney (DA) Intake Form.** The DA’s Office in a local jurisdiction received funding from LaMfC to restructure the decision-making process regarding referrals to juvenile court. System-level changes included the implementation of a risk/needs assessment tool, using the results of the risk/needs tool to inform decisions, and implementing policies regarding diversion for minor offenses. As a result, a mechanism to track the impact of these changes on the system and the youth served was needed. A one-page intake form was developed to track DA decisions. The assistant to the DA was responsible for completing the form and sending them (once a week) to the local university for data entry and analyses. Thus, the evaluation of the reform efforts in the DA’s office was a joint effort among the DA’s office and the local university. The DA Intake form collected information on:

- Youth Demographics
- Current Charges
- Prior Charges
- Current Legal Status
- Arizona Risk Needs Assessment (ARNA)
- Treatment Referral
- DA Decision (Diversion, Formal Processing, Dismiss)

Tracking this information allowed the DA's office to monitor both system process and youth outcome measures. The system measures that were tracked include the number of youth screened using the ARNA, the number of youth referred to diversion, the number of youth referred to court for formal processing, and the offenses for which youth were diverted. Data collected from 2009-2011 indicated that the proportion of referrals that were diverted increased from 36% in 2009 to 50% in 2011 and the proportion of referrals that were referred to court decreased from 38% in 2009 to 27% in 2011.

The outcome measures included the number of youth referred to court that were adjudicated, the length of time in a treatment program, and the percent of youth that recidivated by DA decision (diversion and formal processing). In 2009, 8% of diverted youth and 27% of formally processed youth were re-arrested within one year; in 2011, less than 2% of diverted youth and 16% of formally processed youth were re-arrested within one year.

#### **Probation “Outcome Monitoring” Sheet.**

Increasing the number of evidence-based practices (EBP) within the juvenile justice system was also a goal of LaMfC. For one local jurisdiction, the focus was on increasing EBPs within the probation unit. These reform efforts included the implementation of an evidence-based risk and needs assessment (i.e., the Structured Assessment for Violent Risk in Youth-SAVRY), increasing the use of evidence-based treatment programs, and restructuring probation levels. The department identified a number of system-level and youth outcome measures that were needed to track the effectiveness of these reforms. A two-page form was developed for probation officers to complete after termination of probation. The form was then sent to the department's reform coordinator to be entered into an electronic data base (Microsoft Access) for continual monitoring of both system and youth outcomes. Below is a summary of the data elements collected through the probation data sheet:

- Youth Demographics
- Adjudicated Charge Information
- Initial and Actual Probation Term
- Initial and Ending Probation Level
- Initial and Final SAVRY Risk Level
- Item Results of Each SAVRY Assessment
- Drug Screen Results
- Mental Health Diagnosis
- Treatment Referral and Completion
- Behavior while on Probation
- Completion of Probation Requirements

System measures included the number of youth assessed using the SAVRY, the number of youth referred to an evidence-based treatment program, the number of youth placed on probation across case types (status offense or delinquency), and the number of youth placed on each probation level.

The 2012 data obtained from this form provided important information about probation cases. In 2012, 317 youth were placed on probation. Of these youth, 44% were placed on low risk probation, 50% were placed on moderate risk probation, and 6% were placed on high risk. Ninety-three percent of treatment referrals were to evidence-based programs.

A number of goals of the probation reform efforts including higher completion of evidence-based treatment programs, a reduction in recidivism, and an increase in the number of youth who complete probation successfully were also identified. Data from the probation outcome monitoring sheet indicated that, in 2012, 6% of youth placed on probation had their probation revoked. Additionally, 30% of youth released from probation recidivated within one year and 48% recidivated within two years. It is anticipated that these outcomes are related to agencies matching evidence-based services to objectively identified risks and needs. Research has shown that these services have increased the likelihood of favorable outcomes when deployed to address the behaviors they have been designed to impact—matching services to identified needs.

## System-Wide Innovations

### The Juvenile Justice System Screening, Assessment and Treatment Services Inventory.

Two statewide goals of LaMfC were to 1) increase the use of standardized, research-based screening/assessment instruments and 2) increase the use of evidence-based intervention programs. Two associated outcome measures were the number of youth screened using an evidence-based instrument and the number of youth served by an evidence-based treatment program, with the goal of increasing the number of youth who receive evidence-based services. To track this outcome, a web-based instrument was developed to collect information on local jurisdictions' juvenile justice related services and interventions. The inventory was broken down into two sections about screening and/or assessment practices and treatment services. Below is a brief description of the information collected in each section.

#### Screening/Assessment Practices

Programs/Practices that use instruments  
Use of standardized practices  
Type of information collected  
Number and characteristics of youth served  
Methods of tracking results  
Funding sources

#### Treatment Programs

Types of services  
Use of evidence-based programs  
Number of trained staff  
Sources of treatment referrals  
Number and characteristics of youth served  
Funding sources

The Inventory, which has provided Louisiana with a mechanism to monitor the extent of EBP adoption as reform, has been successful. In fact, significant changes have already been observed since the initial implementation of the survey in 2007 to its most recent application in 2011. The information below highlights some of the statewide results:

- Of respondents who reported providing screening and/or assessment services to juvenile offenders, 50% (n = 131) used research-based instruments in 2007 and 66% used research-based instruments (n = 91) in 2011 (system measure).

- The number of respondents offering evidence-based treatment programs increased 43% from 2007 to 2011 (system measure).
- Of the respondents reporting the use of evidence-based practices, the total percent of youth served by an evidence-based program increased from 19% in 2007 to 46% in 2011 (outcome measure).

**Mapping Survey.** As part of the overall evaluation of LaMfC, a system for conducting a comprehensive mapping of the key decisions points in the juvenile justice system was developed. The goal of this mapping system was to track changes in system processes and youth outcomes at five points in the juvenile justice system: Informal status offense referrals, delinquency arrest, referrals to the DA, juvenile court, and detention. Therefore, a survey was distributed to a representative from each of the five stages. The survey collected information about the following areas:

- The number of youth entering each stage of the system
- Key decisions at each stage, the methods used to make those decisions, and the people involved in the decision-making process
- Satisfaction with the decision-making process
- Information sharing practices
- Data systems used and the available data points

The data from this mapping process provided critical process and outcome measures for each of the three parishes (i.e. counties). For instance, over the 5-year period of LaMfC, one parish showed a decrease in the number of arrests by 11%, widespread adoption of an evidence-based risk and needs assessment instrument, a 25% increase in the number of charges diverted by the district attorney, and a 16% decrease in the number of youth detained. In a second parish, the mapping results showed that over the 5-years of LaMfC, the parish increased the use of standard assessments for determining pre-adjudication detention, decreased the number of days between a youth's arrest and first court appearance, reduced school-based referrals to a status offender program by 40%, and reduced the number of detained youth by 45%.

## Results

The innovations discussed above have resulted in tremendous progress towards a number of agencies' capacity to track outcomes and use data to inform important decisions in the juvenile justice system. Most importantly, these innovations have helped juvenile justice agencies across the state recognize the vital role that data can have in guiding decisions and monitoring effectiveness of policies or programs that may have important effects on system processes, youths served, and public safety.

In addition, the data obtained from these innovations has become a key component of dissemination. The ability to supplement a description of the goals of the reform efforts and the implementation process with objective data supporting its effectiveness provides stronger evidence of the positive effects on the system and the youth it serves. As a result, a number of accomplishments have occurred since the start of LaMfC:

- The restructuring of the informal status offender program, along with data on the system process and youth outcome measures, has benefited a number of jurisdictions statewide.
- The District Attorney's office in a local parish has implemented the screening and assessment procedures that were piloted during LaMfC and continues to monitor the data from these instruments to make decisions about formal processing and appropriate treatment services.
- The Probation Data Sheet continues to be used to track SAVRY results in a local parish, to ensure youth on probation are being linked with appropriate services, and to monitor length of time on probation and recidivism after release. The Probation Data Sheet, along with a "how-to" guide and examples of system process and youth outcome measures, has been disseminated to agencies across the state. At least one additional jurisdiction has adopted the Probation Data Sheet.
- The Juvenile Justice Mapping Survey has been distributed in three jurisdictions across the state. The information obtained through the mapping process has

helped a number of agencies identify needs' and evaluate reform efforts. Most importantly, the result of the mapping survey has sparked discussions across different child-serving agencies regarding areas in need of reform, information-sharing, and the need for data-driven decision-making.

- The Juvenile Justice System Screening, Assessment, and Treatment Services Inventory has been distributed to 46 Louisiana parishes and the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ). The results of the survey have helped numerous communities and agencies identify where reform is needed and to monitor progress towards increasing the use of EBPs. At the state level, the inventory has provided a baseline for measuring progress towards the use of EBPs and identifying jurisdictions that are in need of additional development, training or funding.

In sum, these innovations have highlighted the importance of setting goals, identified how to measure goals, and used data to monitor progress. In addition, there has been a strong movement across the state to develop data collection procedures, evaluate policies and programs, and routinely monitor juvenile justice decision-making. Many of the jurisdictions involved in these efforts have become champions of the use of system and youth outcome measures to monitor effectiveness and are communicating to juvenile justice stakeholders and leadership that data are useful and informative.

## Lessons Learned

The use of data to evaluate reform efforts, policies, and/or programs is a process that begins with identifying goals. Often, identifying the "what" and "why" of data seemed to be the hardest part for an agency attempting to develop system process and youth outcome measures. The next step is translating these goals into measurable outcomes. This can also be challenging because many juvenile justice agencies that are not currently using data to monitor effectiveness do not think or speak in terms of "measurable outcomes" or "data elements". One valuable resource, the university-agency partnership, made becoming data-driven possible for any jurisdiction.



Implementing new data collection procedures requires patience, time, collaboration, and buy-in from agency employees at all ranks of the organization. There has to be careful attention to data quality. If the information is not valid and reliable, the data are useless and possibly, misleading. Further, building the capacity to collect data on a routine basis requires the allocation of resources such as employee time, software, and training. Such resources are often quite scarce for many juvenile justice agencies. However, the ability to objectively evaluate the success of its policies and programs is a key element to a successful juvenile justice system.

### The Broader Impact

In Louisiana, the recognition of the importance of using data to evaluate decision-making processes, reform efforts, and programs or policies has dramatically increased across the state. Through LaMfC dissemination efforts, as well as cross-jurisdiction communication, the motivation to use data to inform decisions and evaluate effectiveness has spread throughout the state. Local agencies are beginning to provide consultation and training to other jurisdictions interested in replicating data collection strategies. Agencies across the state are also reaching out to local universities to develop partnerships around the development of system and youth outcome measures, data collection, and evaluation.

### Resources

Contact the Institute of Public Health and Justice at 504.234.3899 or email Stephen Phillippi at [sphill2@lsuhsc.edu](mailto:sphill2@lsuhsc.edu) to access resources such as:

- 2006-2011 Summary of the Louisiana *Models for Change* Data Deliverables
- Rapides Parish FINS Data Collection Model
- Rapides Parish Law Enforcement Contact Sheet
- The Juvenile Justice System Screening, Assessment and Treatment Services Inventory
- Juvenile Justice Mapping Survey
- 4th JDC District Attorney Intake Form
- Jefferson Parish DJS Probation Outcome Monitoring Sheet

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This brief is one in a series describing new knowledge and innovations emerging from *Models for Change*, a multi-state juvenile justice reform initiative. *Models for Change* is accelerating movement toward a more effective, fair, and developmentally sound juvenile justice system by creating replicable models that protect community safety, use resources wisely, and improve outcomes for youths. The briefs are intended to inform professionals in juvenile justice and related fields, and to contribute to a new national wave of juvenile justice reform.